

WSDOT Communications Philosophy

WSDOT Cares

This is not a platitude like “Have a nice day.” First and foremost, we must let our customers know that we listen to them, care about what they are saying, and can respond to their concerns, whether we do it in person, by phone, or through our tools like the web page.

Customer-focused, two-way communications

WSDOT maximizes opportunities to listen and respond to customers and employees. Providing an open communications environment will foster trust and teamwork, maintaining and improving public confidence in our work. We seek meaningful input early in project development. We listen to concerns, address them when developing policies or projects, and communicate back how we are responding to customer needs.

Coordinated Messages and Tools

While WSDOT’s communications are decentralized throughout the state, our messages are coordinated, as is our use of technology. Consistent information is available to our customers regardless of the source they use to find it. Hard copy information (paper) may not always be the most current.

Proactive

WSDOT is the first and best source of information about the agency, whether the news is good or bad. We provide accurate, timely, complete and open communications on issues for which we are responsible. WSDOT takes the initiative to get out information about current programs, projects and policies.

WSDOT is the “brand”

The brand is what’s in the mind of the customers, not our press releases. We must work to create a positive brand association with our customers. Our communications and actions support and reinforce WSDOT as a whole transportation agency. From here on out, we are one DOT, regardless of region, mode, or office. WSDOT is the sum total of what we do.

“Retail” Communications –

WSDOT speaks directly to our customers whenever possible. We tailor our communications to individuals and their questions. We speak to people where they are, be it in person, through correspondence, via the web or letters to the editor.

“Retail Communicators”

Communications is a team effort that requires all 6,500 of us to effectively deliver our messages to the public in order to be successful. Treat each interaction with the public as an opportunity to show how great WSDOT is. Work closely with the communications staff to prepare for meetings or media interviews. If you are asked questions you don't know how to answer, always refer the customer to someone who does. The Communications staff are especially helpful for this.

“The whole story”

As mentioned above, WSDOT needs to be the first and best source of good and bad information about our projects and policies. This means telling our successes, and admitting our shortcomings. We can actually gain credibility by acknowledging to the public when we have fallen short.

General Communication Tips

- Ask yourself, “Who am I talking to? Who will be reading/hearing this?”
- Speak to your customers. Explain what we do, why we do it and how it can benefit them.
- Write in short rather than long sentences, for real people, not other planners, engineers or bureaucrats. Use English, not jargon, lingo, acronyms.
 - The public doesn't know what a PE, PS&E, wye intersection or thri-bar is.
- Be conversational, but not slangy.
- Write with active verbs.
 - Examples: Write with active verbs vs. having verbs is good
 - “To Be” verbs are “Not to Be” used.
- Include who, what, where, when, why, how and how much. A point to ponder: explaining why we do what we do is crucial so people have a chance to understand what's behind our projects. If we state the why, it shows we've put thought into our actions.
- Describe locations by common geographical references, not by mile post. Remember, Interstates and US highways are **not** SRs.
- Think about your web page, news release, flyer, presentation, etc., from your audience's point view.

- Why is this important to them?
- What information will they most likely want/need to know?
- Define your key messages
 - Examples:
 - WSDOT delivers projects on-time and on-budget.
 - WSDOT is accountable.
 - Avalanche control work allows us to limit closure times and maximize public safety.
- Support those messages with specific details:

For example, you don't just want to make a statement like "We are responsive." You want to be able to say, "We are responsive and have made it possible for you to provide feedback to us via mail, e-mail and telephone," or "The I-5 Widening job in Vancouver will open nearly a year ahead of schedule."

- Always include a contact persons name, email address and phone number for people with follow-up questions.
- Always have someone else proof read your text before finalizing it.
- Use maps, graphics, pictures whenever possible (but avoid engineering drawings that regular people may not be able to read.)

When Writing for Doug:

Know that he is not a one-draft guy. Expect revisions, and don't take them personally! He is a continuous improvement kind of leader. You may have 34 perfect web templates, but then someone will create one with a new, improved feature, instantly rendering the 34 previously perfect pages past tense.

When to Fight Back

If you read a letter to the editor, opinion piece, or editorial that has factual errors, its time to sharpen the pen. Secretary MacDonald is not only willing, but expects us to counter false claims that make WSDOT look bad. This does two things for us: provides a platform to tell our story, hones our image as a responsible, accountable agency willing to set the story straight.